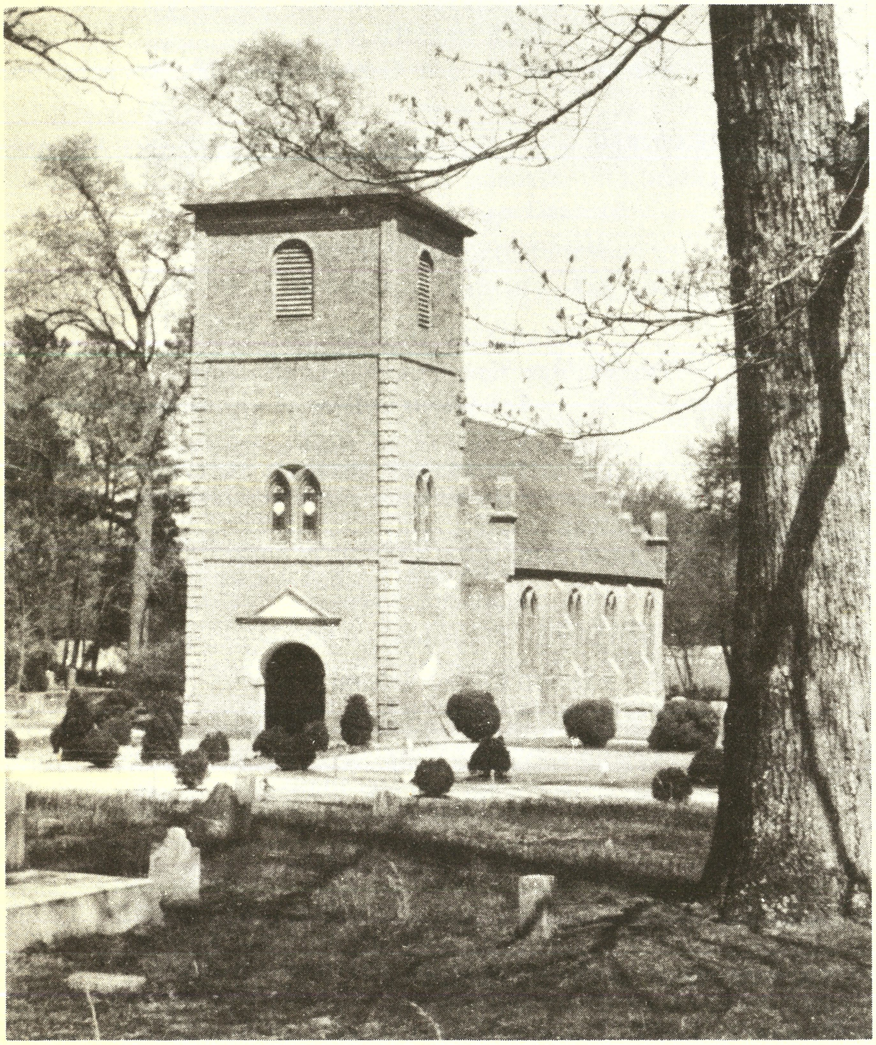
Historic St. Luke's



"HISTORIC ST. LUKE'S CHURCH—c. 1632"
"THE NATION'S OLDEST STANDING CHURCH—A NATIONAL SHRINE"

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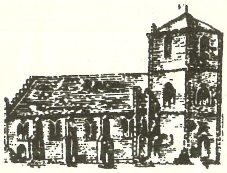
Historic Old St. Luke's
Its History and Restoration



By JAMES GROTE VAN DERPOOL

Restoration Committee—Chairman

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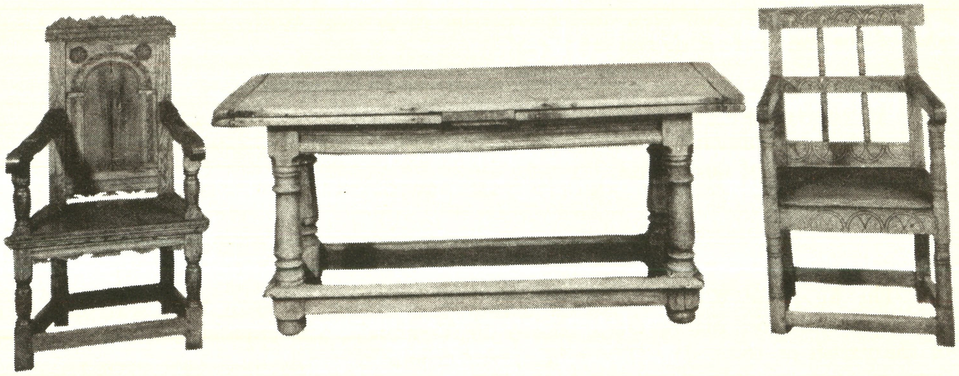
THE venerable church of Old St. Luke's, Mother Church of Warrosquyoake County (later called Isle of Wight), or "Old Brick," as it was affectionately known long before it was given its present designation in 1828, is the oldest existing church of English foundation in this country and the nation's only surviving, *original* Gothic building. As such, it forms a unique bridge between the early civilization of our country and the rich culture of medieval Europe. In it we see an architectural and spiritual descendant of the great Gothic cathedrals of England as reflected in the small parish churches of such English counties as Essex, Surrey, and Gloucestershire.

By tradition, by recollection of the cherished first Vestry Book, and by the style of the church structure itself, it is dated as having been begun in 1632, and so relates closely to the Tower Church at Jamestown which was started in 1638/39, subsequently destroyed, and now happily rebuilt. As was common at the time, some four or five years were required for the erection of such a church; and the finishing of the interior fittings in permanent form might require a number of years more, even in this parish, already numbering 522 persons in the year 1634. This is reflected in the full Gothic character of the main mass of St. Luke's with its Gothic buttresses, stepped gables, brick-traceried windows, and medieval timber-trussed roof structure.

The interior finishing records the lapse of several years, perhaps as many as twenty-five, before the temporary forms were replaced with the permanent ones as now installed here. In the meantime, new settlers brought knowledge of changing fashions in the Mother Country. Life, too, was becoming ampler here, as evidenced in the vicinity by the still existing Jacobean mansion, "Bacon's Castle" (c. 1655). We know that in 1640, John Day (direct ancestor of Henry Mason Day, the President of the Restoration) came from England with his own fine household furniture and personal servants. Sir Christopher Lawne (along with Sir Richard Worsleep and other gentlemen), had come to the area in 1619 and held extensive lands in the region. Colonel Joseph Bridger of "White Marsh" long associated with St. Luke's, a man of large affairs, and a member of the Council of State to Charles II for Virginia, is known to have been settled in the parish at least as early as 1657. By sustained tradition, Colonel Bridger brought from England members of the Driver family to do work on this church. Their skill was directed to this "finishing" of the church, and it must have been extensive as, with the passing of time, Colonel Bridger was given an increasing acknowledgment for the important contribution he had made in bringing



The seventeenth century American chancel furniture at St. Luke's dating from 1640-1660, includes the famous Bolles chair (left), the all but unique Communion table, and the noted chair (right), ascribed to Thomas Dennis, America's earliest identified cabinetmaker.

the church to completion. His remains are marked by one of the ancient marble tombstones in the chancel.

The simple but worthy Jacobean finishing of the interior of St. Luke's thus reflects this enlarged patronage in the tentative, vaguely Tuscan columns formed from the trunk of a tree, the carefully turned balusters of the rood screen and railings, the workmanlike design and joinery of the furniture and appropriate quality of the other worthy fittings.

Since, by the Order of Assembly issued in March 1623, this parish was one of only four locations, other than Jamestown, where the General Court of the Colony was permitted to convene; and, since the Court convened in the church, there was further urgency to make it suitably reflect this important function as soon as possible. The "Lord Governour and Captaine Generall" would thus be present and, during their stay, attend church service. The high box-pews were accordingly designated for their use.

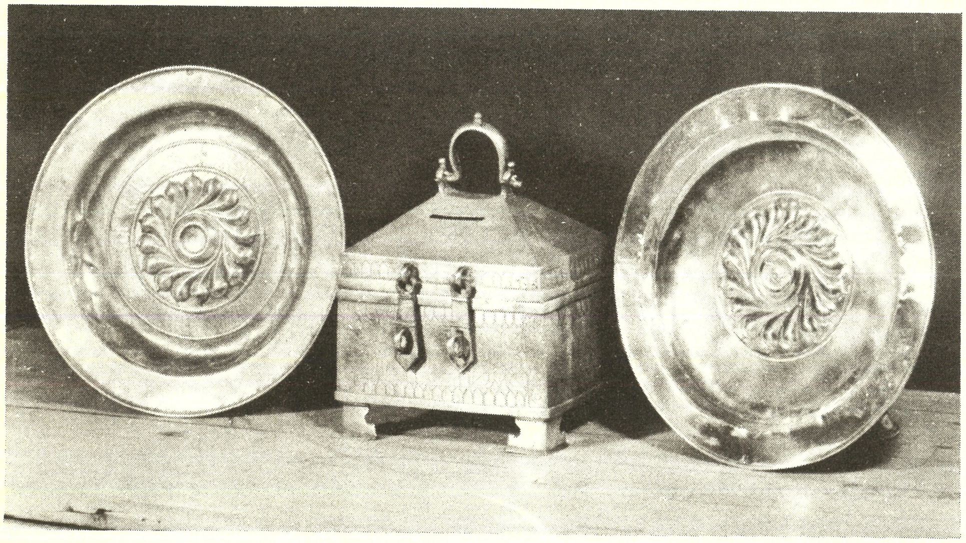
Spared by time and the hands of man, this ancient church, in spite of the vicissitudes of history, has been, in its more than three hundred years of continued existence, the scene of church worship and ceremonies. With the destruction of older churches such as Lord de la Warr's Church of 1610 at Jamestown, Old St. Luke's remains our oldest shrine to preserve within its hallowed walls the echo of the voices of a noble roster of those Founding Fathers and Patriots, who first established the dominion of English laws on this continent in 1607. In 1619 they first implemented the ideals of Democracy on these shores, when twenty-two freely elected Burgesses were met in assembly in Jamestown as our first *representative government*—the direct ancestor of our present National and State Legislatures. Those who first assembled in Old St. Luke's knew much of Captain John Smith, Pocahontas, John Rolfe and Powhatan, who were still regarded as contemporary figures. The tragic Indian Massacre of 1622, which wiped out nearly a third of the Virginia settlers, was a stark memory they vainly sought to erase from their minds. Nathaniel Bacon, the scourge of Governor Berkeley, passed not far from St. Luke's on his way to burn Jamestown in 1676. In the stirring days before the Revolution, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Richard Henry Lee, Patrick Henry, and many other of our great patriots, must have knelt here before the altar and asked for guidance, on their passage to or from Williamsburg, as they slowly shaped the momentous destiny of a nation not yet in being.

And so, down through the ages, the great and the humble figures of the times have journeyed to Old St. Luke's and added both their homage and the impress of their epoch on this church, to make it the most continuing symbol of the history of the development of our nation.

PRELUDE TO THE RESTORATION

The Reverend William Bennett (brother of Edward, who in 1621 was granted a patent to transport one-hundred settlers to Virginia), was appointed the first pastor of the parish in 1622. The church he served around that date must have been a simple, "crotch" type, wooden-frame structure. The parishioners totaled about one hundred-twenty settlers in February 1622, just prior to the Indian Massacre of March 22, 1622. The building of the first church doubtless occurred shortly after this date and must have been at its inception, a very simple structure, compatible with the disturbed and disheartening situation of the moment. We know, however, that Captain Roger Smyth was ordered on May 21, 1623 to build a fort on Bennett's Plantation, and this protection encouraged the resumption of developed plans of settlement.

By 1632 the situation justified the construction of a permanent church, which was doubtless encouraged by the Act of Assembly of February 1631/32 which required that "in all such places where churches are wanting, or decayed, the inhabitants are tyed to contribute towards the building of a church" (or forfeit fifty pounds if not effected before Christmas 1632). The church employed Flemish-bonded brick and was laid out in a single nave plan approximately sixty feet in length by twenty-four in breadth on the inside. The design character followed that of the parish churches the



The rare incised brass alms-box and the pair of alms basins at St. Luke's, date from the early seventeenth century.

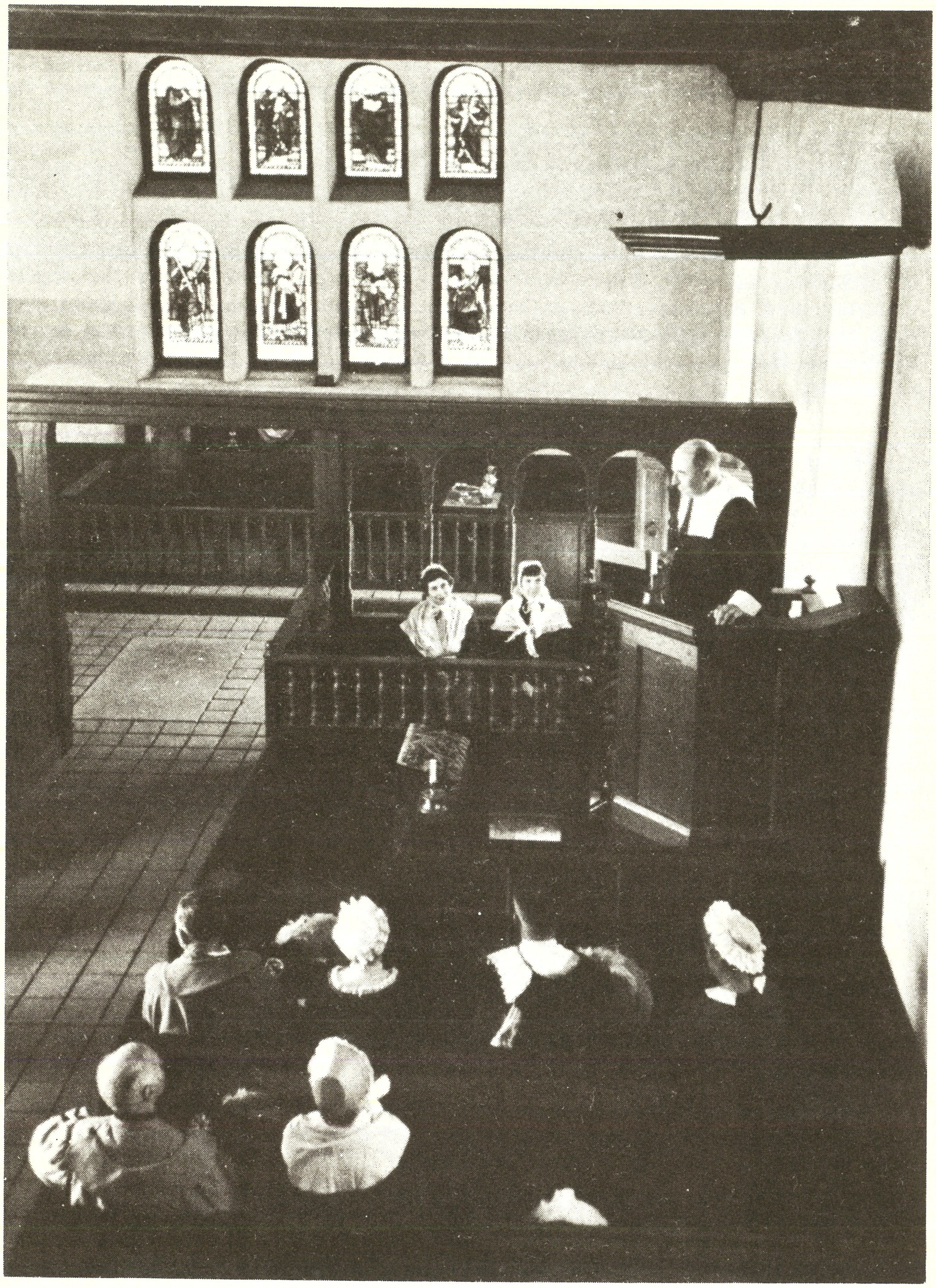
settlers had frequented in England, such as Woodham Walter in Essex and others similar to it. Church and tower were planned at the same time, but the tower as first conceived, was only two storeys in height and doubtless terminated in simple crenelations. The noble traceried windows were a part of the original designs, but were then filled with thin diamond-shaped pieces of clear glass set diagonally in lead cams, quantities of which were found during our excavations on the site.

Services were conducted in the church as soon as the steep-pitched roof was finished and the square-brick floor in place. The church furniture was still temporary and considerable time was required for the completion of the permanent fittings the parishioners envisaged. Of these, the rare communion table, credence, ministers' chairs, pulpits and pews would come first; then the temporary rails, rood-screen and font would be replaced with ones carefully turned and joined. At this stage (c. 1657), the invaluable services of the previously mentioned Driver family were secured from England, by Colonel Joseph Bridger who came from a prominent Gloucestershire family and wished the church to be "suitably" finished. The design of the rood-screen was arched like the minister's chair. The balusters in the screen, chancel rail, gallery stairs, "Family" pews, and the columnar supports of the gallery reflect the Jacobean style favored by Colonel Bridger. Though still tentative in design, these details were well advanced for the time and region.

On the exterior, the corners of the already existing tower doubtless were "enriched" at this time by the addition of the Jacobean quoins as a means of complimenting the vague classicism of the existing "pediment." These quoins have been carefully retained in our restoration, as they may well be the earliest surviving examples in this country. The third storey of the tower was not to be added until the last quarter of the seventeenth century, as "documented" by the inscribed initials of "C. D. & T. D." (possibly second generation members of the Driver family—Charles and Thomas are known to have reached their maturity at this time). It is probable that a more "up-to-date" terminus to the tower, like the present one, was used (in place of the earlier crenelations) to harmonize with the simple pilaster-strips that mark the corners of this third storey of the tower in line with the quoins of the lower two storeys. It is by no means easy to explain this change in corner treatment, unless it was based on a "half-understood" application of the achitectural theory that the use of rustication (as reflected in our quoins) is a satisfactory treatment for a basement storey located below a higher storey that is treated with pilasters (in our case, pilaster-strips). Such an application would appear possible only at a time and place such as this, when a fullness of technical knowledge could scarcely be assumed.

As the eighteenth century progressed, a classic cornice (removed in the nineteenth century) was added to the top of the tower. The interior, too, was "modernized" by installing a plaster compass-vault which concealed the "old-fashioned" medieval timber tie-beam roof structure. The early furnishings gave way and the rood-screen was eliminated.

During the turbulent years of the American Revolution, Old St. Luke's was often threatened. Colonel Tarleton's dreaded British troops encamped in the church yard, but the ancient Vestry Books had already been buried for safety and the church itself came through unscathed. In 1777, the Vestry was dissolved; in 1785, the Church of Virginia itself was disestablished; and for nearly forty years, only occasional services were held in St. Luke's, and it was allowed to fall into disrepair. It was rehabilitated about 1821 and again served an active religious life until it was partially abandoned in 1836, when the new Christ Church was completed in nearby Smithfield, and it continued to serve primarily as a beloved summer chapel.



The interior of St. Luke's, looking past the triple-decker pulpit, the "Family" box-pews and through the rood screen toward the chancel.

The darkest hour in the long history of St. Luke's Church came in 1887, when a storm of unusual violence occurred causing the roof and a part of the east gable to collapse. Its rehabilitation seemed hopeless until the Reverend David Barr succeeded in enlisting the financial assistance necessary for its repair and refurbishing.

Some half century later, in 1953, it was discovered that the foundations were crumbling to dust, and large parts of the walls and roof were in a state of greatest jeopardy. Its destruction was pronounced imminent. The nation was about to lose forever its oldest existing church, and was deeply shocked.

An age that has suffered such drastic change as ours, has learned to treasure symbols of permanent value. St. Luke's was declared a national shrine. Under the inspired leadership and ceaseless efforts of Henry Mason Day, generous people from every walk of life, came forward to organize and finance its faithful restoration as a labor of love so that it would become a valid historical document to inspire generations yet unborn.

THE 1953-1957 RESTORATION

Today, you see about you the results of our four years of patient, continuing research and archeological investigations. The problem was peculiarly difficult since no comparable building was still in existence in this country to guide us. Consequently, the internal evidence in the structure itself had to be explored microscopically. The evidence so revealed, when joined with old documentation dealing with lost buildings here and comparable buildings in the Mother Country, has proven of the highest value, as expressed through the architectural acumen of Robert I. Powell. The church once more is established as a seventeenth century architectural document.

As you approach the church through its mellow park-like setting, the fine tower emerges, rising in three storeys. The broad, arched doorway is set in the thick walls of the tower, and its head is "rendered" with a mortar wash, as is the interior of the open porch, following an old practice of the times in both Virginia and in England. The primitive pediment-like device above the portal is original and is doubtless the oldest surviving example in this country, although an earlier one had occurred in the North Virginia Plantation. The elipical penetrations in the side walls of the porch are likewise of great interest (a variant occurs in the east wall of the church) and betrays, as does the "pediment," a vague awareness of the tentative classicism encountered in England in the last half of the sixteenth century.

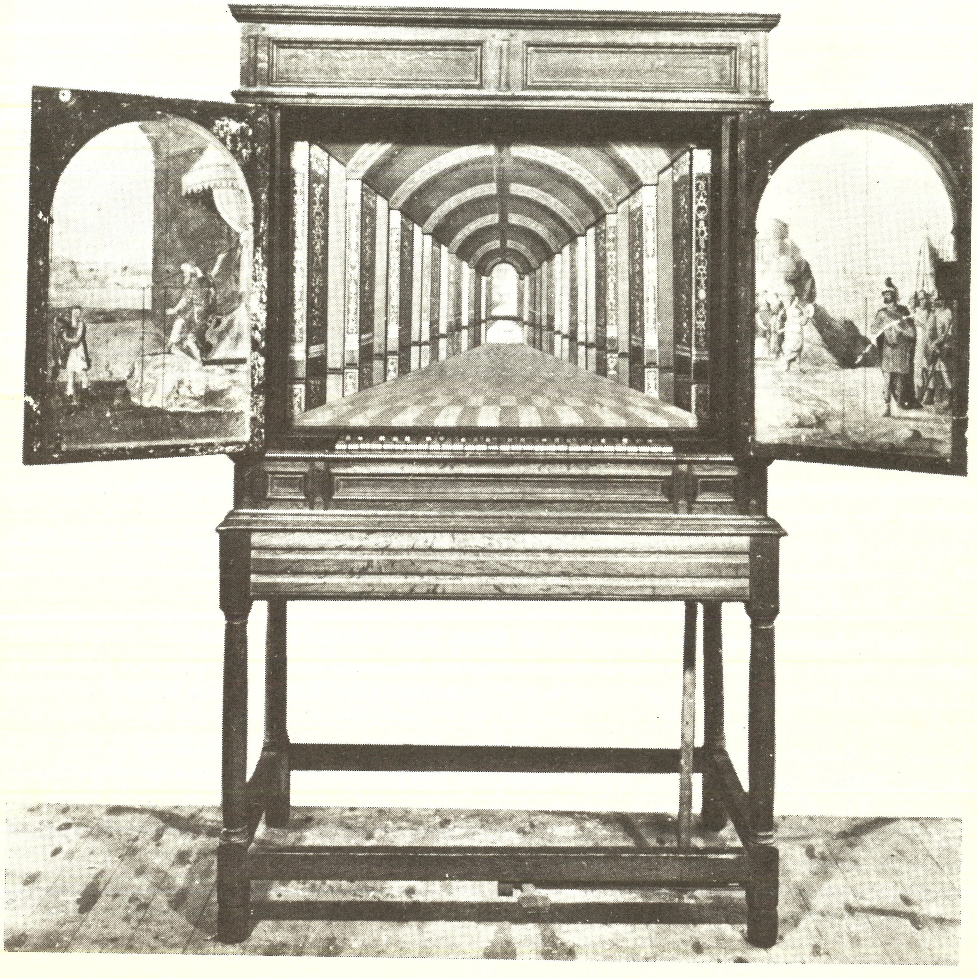
The fine original Gothic stepped gables, wall buttresses and brick-traceried windows are among the chief architectural treasures surviving from our country's earliest days. The great east window, in particular, would lend grace to many a Gothic church in England. It eloquently bears testimony that the settlers in Isle of Wight were not adventurers, but had come to build "another England" on these shores.

One may well speculate as to whether grateful acknowledgment should not be made to some generous benefactor in England for gifts that made so worthy a church possible—such as that Mistress Mary Robinson of London, who on February 13, 1618 bequeathed £ 200 for a church and a college "toward the helpe of the poor people in Virginia . . . " She also gave a *silver gilt* cup and "rich ornaments for *two* Communion tables." (This church silver is in the possession of St. John's Church, Hampton.) We know that money support also came from a larger source, as indicated in the letter which James I sent to the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1617, requesting that alms be collected from all the parishes of the realm on certain Sundays for the use of the churches in the plantation, and be sent them half-yearly.

We may also recall in connection with the "grandeur" of this church for the times, that the 1639 Governor's Castle at St. Mary's, Maryland was a structure twice the size of St. Luke's—and that area was in a still earlier stage of settlement than this part of Virginia, as disclosed by Henry C. Forman.

As one prepares to enter the church, attention should be paid to the very unusual architrave around the doorway. The original portion of this was found still in place, beneath later construction. It may well constitute our oldest surviving example of a classic architrave in this country, and reflects the same tentative spirit as the "pediment" over the entrance to the porch. The mouldings, crude and unknowledgeable, are not *applied* as in later work, but are *hewn* out of a single oak beam. The upright

The St. Luke's organ is a rare example of English origin, c. 1665. It is a signed work by the eminent "Father" Smith (Schmidt) who with Charles and Rene Harris led the revival in organ building in Post-Restoration England.



members at the sides are structural posts similarly shaped, and their union with the horizontal member is not *mitered*, but *coped* and *feather-edged*, and then stoutly joined together by an eight-inch mortise-and-tenon, which is locked in place by a large exposed oak dowel.

The door itself is based on that unique Virginia example preserved at Yeocomoco Church, and believed to be a relic of the first Yeocomoco Church of c. 1653. The inclusion of the small wicket door within the larger one preserves a medieval custom frequently found in Gothic churches.

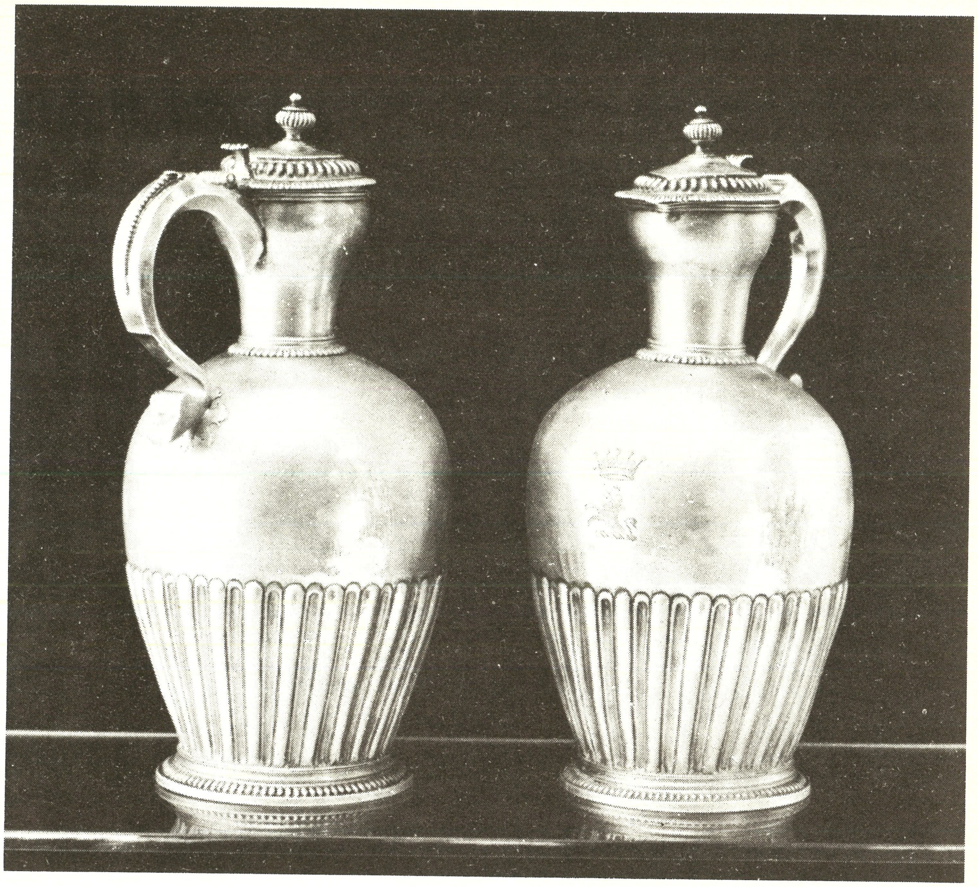
One of the chief glories of the interior is its splendidly developed Gothic tie-beam timber roof structure, whose members are enriched with chamfer and lamb's-tongue mouldings. This is the *exact design* of the original roof, which by the greatest good fortune, was found traced against the west wall of the nave, when the workmen removed the later plaster work—even the forms of the mouldings were preserved where the original plaster curled up against the tie-beam. The brick wall above the collar-beam was found never to have been plastered, which confirmed that the trusses had not been open to the ridge. The evidence could scarcely have been more complete, if original sketches had been handed down to us. We have here a unique document on Gothic building methods carried over to Virginia, and further evidence of high importance in support of the early dating of the church.

Two successive later floors had to be removed to return to the original floor level, where traces of the first square bricks remained. These were carefully measured and similar ones secured. In restoring the early floor level, the ground level outside the porch also had to be lowered, as it had risen a number of inches in the ensuing three centuries.

The present rood-screen is the first to be restored to a seventeenth century church in this country. The trace of its footings was discovered in our excavations. Eventually our research located documentary evidence of at least four other rood-screens in Virginia, one of the few colonies to make use of this fascinating Pre-Laudian feature. The Isle of Wight Church, England, still had a rood-screen in the seventeenth century, so this feature was well known to various of our early settlers who had worshipped in that church before coming to these shores.

The chancel rail occurred in some Pre-Laudian churches and is recurrently used down to the present day. The square chancel-pews are noted at certain dates in the surviving vestry book, as allotted respectively to the wives of the justices and vestrymen, and to the young women of the parish. The kneeling rail, which separates these pews from the chancel, is a transitional feature and recalls the earlier Pre-Laudian practice of surrounding the communion table (placed east and west) with a continuous rectangle of this *prie-dieu* type, except for an opening on the west side.

The furnishings of the chancel are of exceptional rarity. The American Communion table (c. 1640) of white walnut is one of the few recorded examples. The two minister's chairs are American of the mid-seventeenth century. The one with the arched-wainscot back was formerly in the Bolles collection, and the other, with baluster back and half lunette decoration, has been ascribed to Thomas Dennis, our earliest identified American cabinetmaker. The altar cloth, alms basins and pricket candlesticks are also seventeenth century. The Pinckney Family Bible, with Book of Common Prayer, and Book of Psalms is the first Cambridge King James edition of 1629, which is the exact edition of the original St. Luke's bible. The credence table near the font, is closely related in design to the communion table, and is likewise an American seventeenth century piece. From the celebrated Morton Plant collection in New York came the notable pair of



The pair of Silver wine flagons is of disinguished design. Each bears the London hallmarks for the year 1683 and an unidentified "T.B." as the maker. Other pieces of the church plate include the great silver trencher-plate, or paten, of 1696 and the superb silver-gilt chalice of c. 1600.

wine flagons, bearing the London hall mark of 1683 and an unidentified "T.B." as the maker. (The use of two flagons is noted in the following entry: "Ordered That the said two Setts of Comunion Plate consists of *four* Flagons two Chalices and five Plates." —Vestry Book of Christ Church Parish, Middlesex Co., Va.—March 31, 1718). The great silver trencher-plate, or paten, was made by Robert Timbrell in London in 1696. (Contemporary use of the trencher-plate is confirmed by: "Capt. Henry Creeke out of his pious zeal and love to the Church, hath Bestowed and given upon The 17th day of April Last 1681 upon the upper Chappell of Ease to Christ Church in Middlesex County Vizt one *Silver Trencher* plate weighing about (?) ounces, Ingraven with the *Coate of Armes* of Henry Corbin Esqr. . . ."—Vestry Book of Christ Church Parish, Middlesex County, Va.). In passing, it should be noted that at this time, a single large

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in America"

THOMAS E. TALLMADGE

piece of Communion bread was placed on the trencher, or paten, and the communicants "broke bread" from this single piece. Small patens, originally chalice covers, subsequently took over this function when small, separate pieces of bread were offered. The early seventeenth-century *silver-gilt chalice* might almost answer the description of that bequeathed by Mistress Mary Robinson in 1618, as noted earlier.

The antique cut-velvet covering of the chancel furnishings dates from the 17th century and exemplifies the richness which was sought in such features, as noted in the 1610 accounts of William Strachey, new Secretary of the Colony, in referring to the church at Jamestown of that date:

> "It is so cast as it be very light within and the Lord Governour and Captaine Generall doth cause it to be kept passing sweet and

trimmed up with divers flowers with a Sexton belonging to it, and in it every Sonday wee have sermons twice a day and every Thursday a Sermon, having true (two) preachers which take their weekly turnes . . . Every Sonday, when the Lord Governour and Captaine Generall goeth to Church, he is accompanied with all the Counsailors, Captaines, other Officers and all the Gentlemen, and with a Guard of Holberdiers in his Lordship's livery, faire red cloakes, to the number of fifty, both on each side and behinde him: and being in the Church, his Lordship hath his seate in the Quier, in a green Velvet Chaire, with a Cloath, with a Velvet Cushion spread on a Table before him, on which he kneeleth, and on each side sat the Counsell, Captaines, and Officers, each in their place, and when he returneth home againe, he is waited on to his house in the same manner."

Special attention should be paid to the exceedingly rare original seventeenth century, Post-Restoration organ, made by the famous Bernard Smith in England.

The "Family" box pews, in our case (not being the Government church) were used by the "Governour and Captaine Generall" when in attendance. They are extremely simple in design and fittings when compared to contemporary English examples, which on occasion, were completely enclosed, had a fireplace in them, were furnished with rich furniture, and might even have had a door opening directly from the church yard.

The triple-decker pulpit provided separate areas for the clerk, reader and minister. The service was largely conducted from this point close to the congregation, except during Communion. It was usual to have a wig-stand and hour-glass on the pulpit. Sometimes three hour-glasses, of differing sizes, were used to record varying lengths of time. The superbly embroidered lecturn hangings date from the early eighteenth century, and reflect a pious gift from the Mother Country.

The open pews in St. Luke's follow the design of those in the north aisle of Great Milton Church in Oxfordshire. It is possible that our original pews varied in design, as it was sometimes the custom, in both Virginia and England, to have the seat-holders responsible for the construction of their own pews. The arrangement of the pews also varied at this time. There is some evidence to indicate they were, at times, arranged to face the pulpit, rather than the chancel. In Virginia, the men sat on one side of the aisle and the women on the other. Young maidens were often given a separate location, as indicated in our Vestry records, as were the "wives of the Justices and the Vestrymen."

The font was an important architectural and symbolic feature in a church. Visually, it was the principal element at the west end of the nave. Symbolically, it indicated spiritual entrance into the "Church." The St. Luke's font in its construction, follows a description of the one installed in the 1610 church at Jamestown which was "hewen hallow like a canoa." Our font and cover are actually shaped from one great segment of a tree trunk, "hewn" out, and then shaped to its final form. The silver basin inside is an early American piece ascribed to Jacob Boelen (1654-1729). The ensemble constitutes a work of great distinction. In point of design, it is a precursor to the famous one in Christ Church, Philadelphia.

The alms box is an early brass coffer dating from the beginning of the 17th century. The use of such boxes goes back to the early days of the Christian Church. The contents were not only devoted to the succor of the poor, but also to other worthy projects. For example, the Crusades were in part financed through such means.

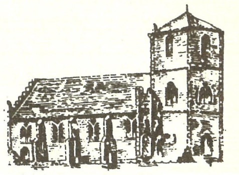
Like the font, the vaguely classical columnar supports for the gallery, were shaped from the trunk of a tree. In character, they relate to the design of the balusters, one of which was happily preserved. Specifically, their design reproduces an extant pair of such gallery supports preserved in the parish church at Puddletown, Dorset.

It was customary to display the Royal Arms of the English Sovereign (often on the gallery rail). The Decalogue, Apostles' Creed, and Lord's Prayer, painted on wooden panels, generally hung in the chancel. The Hatchments of local families were often suspended from the walls of the church and were used during obsequies of the family in question.

The fine gallery at the rear, follows the design of the original, the determinants of which were disclosed during the restoration work. The iron torcheres on the west wall are 17th century American pieces of Maryland ecclesiastical origin.

The original casement windows, fitted with small diamond-shaped panes of thin, clear, glass set in lead cams, unfortunately were replaced late in the 19th century, by the present stained-glass windows, whose designs reflect homage to the church and its rich historical associations.

The Beginnings of Virginia



By Dumas Malone

Biographer of Thomas Jefferson and Noted American Historian

THREE centuries and a half ago, the country known by the name of Virginia comprised all the vast region claimed by the English Crown on the continent of North America. Following a voyage of Sir Walter Raleigh to these shores in the reign of the first Elizabeth, it was called Virginia—not merely because she was a Virgin Queen, but also, in the words of an early historian, because the land seemed "to retain the virgin purity and plenty of the first creation." Before the end of the sixteenth century the gallant Sir Walter sought to establish a settlement in this goodly country but it met an unhappy fate. The venture was made in the sands of Roanoke Island, on the coast of what was called North Carolina in another century. In the time of King James I, who followed Queen Elizabeth and gave his name to the first enduring settlement, the country of Virginia extended almost the whole length of the Atlantic coast. According to the charter of 1606, which authorized this settlement, it comprised all the region from the thirty-fourth to the forty-fifth parallels of latitude, that is, from what is now the Cape Fear River to what is now Bangor, Maine.

Below it on charts and maps of the time was the vaguely defined region that was called Florida. The Spanish had established themselves at St. Augustine and claimed lands much further up the coast. Far to the north was Nova Francia. The French were trying to establish themselves in what afterwards became the maritime provinces of Canada; they had already ascended the St. Lawrence, and they soon had a noble fortress at Quebec. Afterwards the English made good their claim to lands considerably below the Cape Fear, including the present states of South Carolina and Georgia, and eventually they expelled the French from the entire continent, but their first concern was to establish themselves on lands "not now actually possessed by any Christian Prince or People." They were trying to get between the Spanish and the French and to avoid direct conflict with either. They did not admit that the heathen Indians had title to the soil though they did recognize a responsibility to Christianize them.

If history and nomenclature had followed only a slightly different course all of the later inhabitants of English America might have been known as Virginians. Actually, two colonizing ventures were authorized by King James in 1606. One of these was to be in the southern part of the immense region commonly called Virginia, one in the northern. The second of these—on the banks of the Kennebec in the present state of Maine—failed after a dreadful winter (1607-1608). The settlement on the James, succeeding after dire tribulations, preempted the name Virginia. By later definition this became a more restricted region, though by any reckoning it was a huge one. On the coastward side the bounds of the colonial province became those of the state as we now know it, but it extended indefinitely toward the western seas.

The settlement of English America was begun in a spirit of ardent patriotism, religious zeal, and joyous adventure. Strictly speaking, the English Crown did not start it, though King James gave his consent and support in the form of a charter. A legal document from him was necessary to give title to any portion of the land, and the protection of the Royal Navy was essential. But the settlement was made by a company, the Virginia Company of London, just as the ill-fated contemporary venture on the Kennebec was made by the Virginia Company of Plymouth. Before its day was done this London company received other charters, leading to changes in organization and procedure, but the fundamental fact was that the risks both of life and fortune were taken by individuals. This was private enterprise with public support, and it had notable differences from the colonizing ventures of the Spanish further south and the French further north.

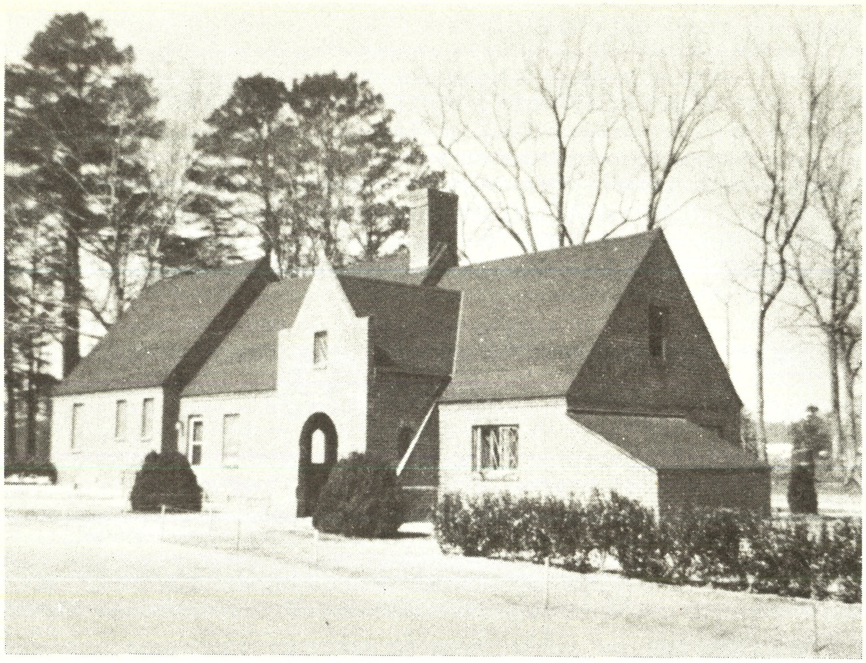
One difference was suggested by certain promises King James made to those who were trying to set up an English outpost in the western wilderness. Though the ocean should divide them from the homeland, they were to have the "liberties, franchises, and immunities" of Englishmen. These were not as great at home as they became later, but, whatever they were, the colonists were to have them. While remaining subjects of the distant King they were to be no more his slaves than if they had stayed on their native island. They were to serve the interests of their country by gaining a foothold on this continent, they were to spread the English form of Christianity, and it was assumed that the development of the colony would contribute to the growth of English trade. It was supposed that the investors of money would profit from the venture, though really they never did. Precious metals might be found—even gold—though actually they were not.

This scheme of colonization left a place for individual settlers to gain something from their hardships and dangers, though, on the James, many a man wholly lost his human investment. If the firstcomers had not been stimulated by zest for adventure, warmed by patriotic ardor, and supported by religious faith, they probably would not have been there at all. But it was this combination of individual effort with public backing which caused the English colonization in America to be more successful in the end than that of the Spanish or French, both of whom were more concerned to fill the royal coffers and less concerned for individual human beings.

Toward the end of the year 1606 about a hundred men, who were expected to be the first planters of Virginia, sailed from London with a complement of seamen on the *Sarah Constant*, the *Godspeed*, and the *Discovery*. Far more than later periods of English colonization, the first was marked by a spirit of romantic adventure. A poem in honor of these voyagers was written by Michael Drayton, later poet laureate. Two of its stanzas, in particular, reflect the combination of hopes and dreams with which this little argosy was launched.

And cheerfully at sea
Success you still entice,
To get the pearl and gold,
And ours to hold
Virginia,
Earth's only Paradise! . . .

And in regions far
Such heroes bring ye forth
As those from whom we came;
And plant our name
Under that star
Not known unto our north.



Historic St. Luke's Gate House Gift Shop

Captain Newport and his little ships went by the customary southern route—that is, by the West Indies—and they were five months on their voyage. This was enough to take the bloom off anybody's romancing, and about a third of the prospective settlers actually died before reaching Chesapeake Bay toward the end of April. But the luxuriance of the vegetation, as the land was bursting with spring, confirmed the belief that they had come to the garden of the world. A few years later the redoubtable Captain John Smith said: "Heaven and Earth never agreed better to frame a place for man's habitation." The whole land was covered with primeval forests, yet there was a surprising absence of undergrowth. The Indians had burned it in the course of their deer-hunting, while the moisture in the air prevented the destruction of the trees. Even more impressive than the land to these voyagers were the waters. Chesapeake Bay and the great rivers flowing into it were like so many arms of the sea, pointing into the interior of an unknown land.

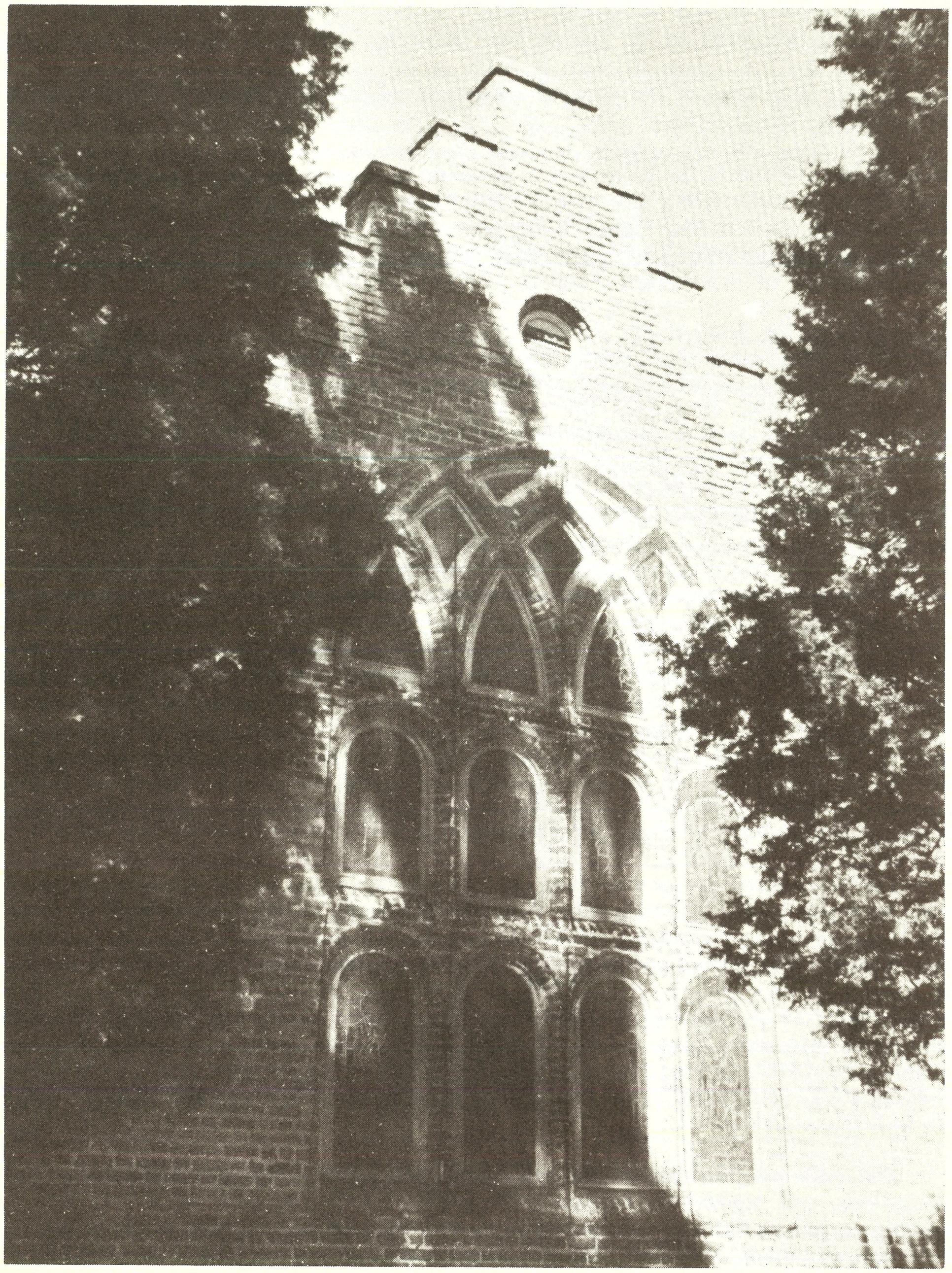
Since navigators were still looking for a northwest passage to the Pacific, it was natural that these ships turned up the largest of the rivers, which they named the James for the King. That they proceeded as far upstream as they did was chiefly because they wanted to reduce danger from the Spanish. Largely for reasons of defense they decided to make settlement on a peninsula (afterwards an island). They violated their instructions, however, when in the month of May, 1607, they established themselves in a low, moist place. They were right in clinging to the waterways, which were their highways, but, from the point of view of health, they could have found a better site than Jamestown. Even under the most favorable conditions, a period of seasoning was required before Englishmen could adjust themselves to this new climate, and it is not surprising that the early mortality was terrific.

Danger from the Indians long hung over the little outpost, fever was a persistent enemy, and famine stalked at first. In its primeval state the land was abundantly fruitful, but clearing it was slow business and required heavy labor of an unaccustomed sort. This was not such adventure as many of this first company were looking for, and inevitably some of them became rebellious. Time was required to learn what food crops were suitable. Not until two cycles of the seasons had rolled round did these Englishmen begin to cultivate Indian corn. Previously, such settlers as survived were largely dependent on food supplied by the natives or transported from home on successive voyages. Those frail barks that crossed the wide seas also brought human cargoes to restore the dwindling band. Captain John Smith, who arrived from England with the first group and became president of the resident Council in the fall of 1608, is credited with the cultivation of Indian corn. It was he who explored Chesapeake Bay and opened the way for future expansion. His very considerable exploits lost nothing in his own account of them.

After him, however, came the most terrible experience of all, the "Starving Time" of 1609-1610. Such animals as were brought into the colony propagated with extraordinary rapidity, but they and the stock of grain were all consumed while the settlement was little more than a beleaguered garrison. Arriving in May 1610 from Bermuda, where he had been long detained after a hurricane, Sir Thomas Gates decided to abandon what seemed a hopeless venture. He actually sailed for home with the pitiful human remnant, but the arrival of Lord De La Warr with reinforcements and supplies caused him to turn back.

In England, the efforts of the Company had been redoubled. After a publicity campaign which suggests a modern drive, more money and more men were poured into the flagging enterprise in the name of patriotism and religion. In the settlement itself, there was a period of virtual military government (1611-1616) during which discipline was harsh. Security and success had to be attained before there could be much individual liberty. Meanwhile, John Rolfe had begun to cultivate tobacco and had married Pocahontas. The former event was important in economic history; a saleable crop was discovered, and the foundations of prosperity were being laid in smoke. The other event was significant in Indian relations, though there was a terrible massacre in 1622, after both the Princess Pocahontas and her father, the Emperor Powhatan, had died.

The most notable phase of the Company's rule followed the military period. Under the influence of Sir Edwin Sandys, the policy of military harshness and communal labor was replaced by one of increased local self-government and private ownership of land. In 1619 the famous House of Burgesses, the first English representative assembly in the New World, was established. Also, slaves were introduced, though there were not to be many of them until nearly the end of the century. More important at the time was the headright system, whereby 50 acres of land were granted for each person brought into the colony. This led to the creation of large plantations by those who could afford to stock and man them, and also to the easier acquisition of land by settlers who brought only themselves and their families. Many laborers were brought in on indentures, whereby they bound themselves for a stipulated term of years in order to work out the cost of their passage. Events proved that they themselves could easily get land, after their service was over, and many of them prospered. There were already women in the colony, but nothing like enough of them to permit every man to have a family. The arrival of a shipload of prospective wives in 1619 was a most romantic event, but also it contributed greatly to social normality.



The east facade of St. Luke's, with its great original window tracery, is one of the most important architectural "documents" preserved from the earliest days of this country.

These strenuous and constructive efforts on the part of the Company might have brought real prosperity to the colony, but "sicknesse" appeared, especially among the newcomers, and the Indian massacre of 1622 severely reduced the population and forced a temporary shrinkage in the area of settlement. Military defense had been sacrificed too much in order to extend tobacco culture. These disasters provided the occasion for the loss of the Company's charter in 1624, and the beginning of a century and a half of royal rule. Henceforth, there was a governor appointed by the King, along with a local Council; and, after a few years, King Charles I, who had succeeded his father, permitted the election of a House of Burgesses. Thus the oldest of the English colonies resumed the course toward self-government which was to reach a climax in 1776, when the Declaration of Independence was penned by a Virginian.

Prior to the loss of the Company's charter, which ended the first period of Virginia history, more than 5000 emigrants had left England for the settlement, and at the end of the period the total population barely exceeded 1000. The net survival was less than 20%. In human life the cost of this patriotic enterprise was fantastic. Later settlements were to benefit from the lessons of this grim experience—this was notably true in the neighboring province of Maryland—and nowhere else on the continent was the cost to be so high. In the next decade the growth from these small and troubled beginnings was rapid. The total population was about 5000 when Old St. Luke's Church was built in what is now Isle of Wight County.

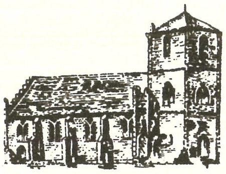
Those who directed the affairs of the settlement from London, during this first and most experimental period of colonization, encouraged an amazing number of economic projects. In retrospect it appears that they attempted too much rather than too little. They tried to establish the iron industry near the falls of the James, to set up sawmills, to establish glass factories for the making of beads for the Indian trade. They encouraged the cultivation of a large number of agricultural products—cotton, indigo, wine, and silk. By the time that Virginia became a royal province, however, tobacco had proved to be the most suitable and profitable product. After the Indian massacre of 1622, settlement resumed its way along the tidal rivers and the agricultural economy of the province assumed its historic form.

The educational projects of these early years, like many of the economic projects, have been obscured if not forgotten. Funds were actually raised, contributions received, and lands set aside to support a college. Also, proposals were made to set up a "publique free school." The immediate failure of these early plans cannot be attributed to lack of interest in education, but chiefly to the difficulties into which the colony fell and to the dispersed character of the settlement after relative safety was assured. Also, the impulse to missionary work among the Indians suffered a severe blow in the massacre of the early 1620's and was slow in reviving. When at length the College of William and Mary was established (1693) it was expected to serve not only the white colonists but also the redskins.

The religious purposes of the settlement were written into the earliest charters, instructions, and legislation. Captain John Smith reports that even when they had to worship under an old sail, which served as awning, and had nothing better to sit on than unhewed trees, they had common prayer morning and evening, two sermons on Sundays, and Holy Communion every three months till their minister died. They kept up daily prayers afterward until more preachers came. Their religion was a constituent part of the civilization they were trying to transplant in this wilderness setting. They needed its consolation in their many sufferings, and in carrying out its observances they renewed their ties with home. This patriotic settlement, which was made before the chasm in the Church of England widened in the days of Archbishop Laud, was and continued to be loyal to the Establishment. In doctrines and moral standards, however, the differences between early Virginia and Puritan New England were far fewer than the similarities. Some of the earliest laws about Sabbath observance were as severe as those in Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut, though in the dispersed conditions of Virginia life, enforcement was more difficult than in a closeknit New England town.

Some of the firstcomers were boisterous adventurers who could swear mighty oaths, but the bulk of the early settlers were Godfearing. Provision for churches was made at the very beginning. Land was set aside and tithes were imposed to support the clergy. Through force of circumstances, the churches were under the control of local vestrymen to a far greater degree than in England. Hence there was little ecclesiasticism. Forms of worship were necessarily simplified, but the colonists clung to accustomed practices for patriotic as well as religious reasons, and anybody who had any books at all had the King James Version of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer.

Within a quarter of a century after this first establishment of an English society in a new land and warmer clime, the province of Virginia was beginning to assume the forms—political, economic, religious, and social—that were to characterize it for generations. One old writer said: "The inhabitants are very courteous to travellers, who need no other recommendation but the being human creatures." He also said in biblical language that the country must be a happy climate, since it was in very nearly the same latitude as the Land of Promise. The experiment in colonization which began on the banks of the James was endangered by much blundering on the part of inexperienced men in the colony and in England. It was haunted by famine, sickness, and speedy death at first, and by human bickering until it achieved a relatively settled life. But this old story remains an epic of national patriotism, written in an age of adventure which was also an age of faith. Neither gold nor pearls were found in Virginia, and the place was not just the sort of Paradise that men had dreamed of, but to its own people it did prove to be a land of abundant promise, and from these beginnings a great nation grew.



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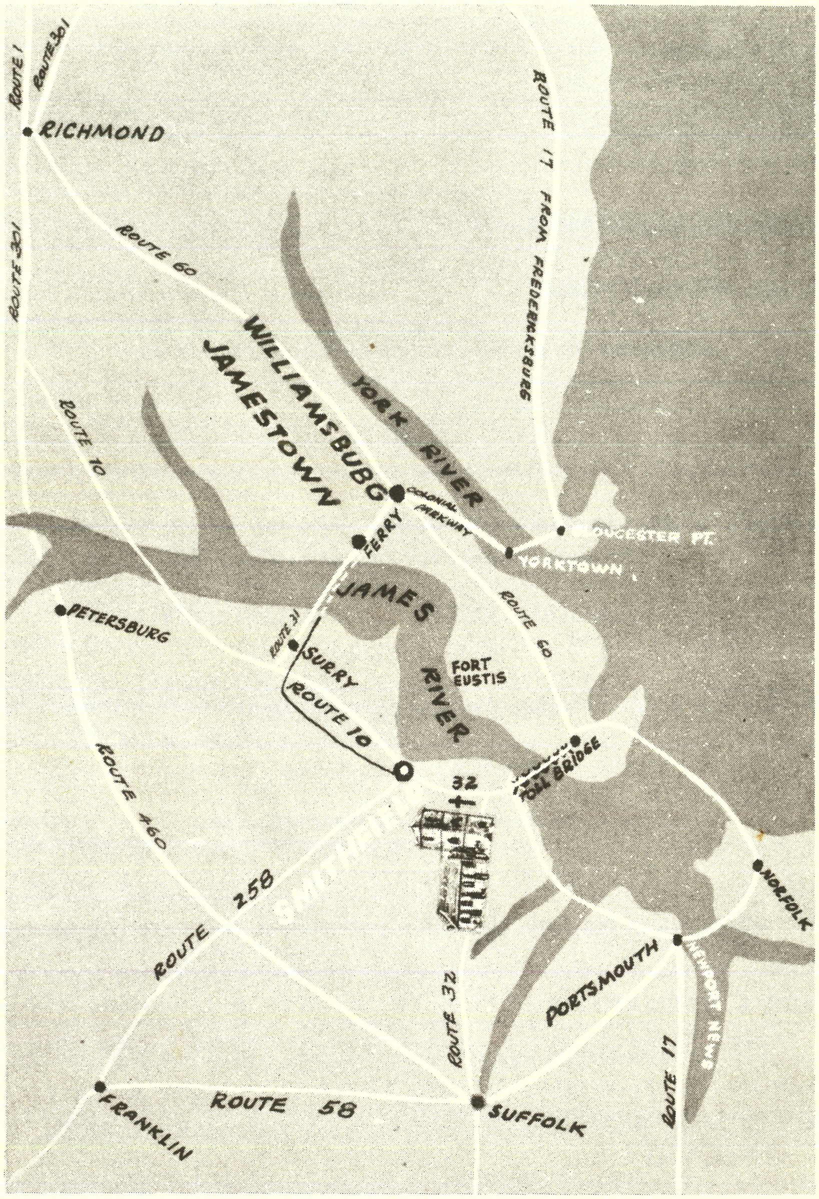
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